

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002797

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E.O. 12598: 1.6X6

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S RISKS IN SUPPORTING US ON AFGHANISTAN

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Classified by CDA Andrews; Reasons 1.6X6.

¶1. (C) Since September 11, the Obasanjo Administration has lent unequivocal diplomatic support to USG anti-terrorists efforts, including coalition military operations against Al Qaeda and its Taliban hosts. This unambiguous support was not a given. Nigeria, home to Sub-Saharan Africa's largest Muslim population has its own ethno-religious dynamic. Domestic political expedience would have had Obasanjo hold his tongue, mute his support, or condemn both the September 11 attacks and our response. However, he did not flinch. Acting more a statesman than a politician on this issue, he moved toward what he thought were Nigeria's wider, long-term interests.

¶2. (C) As a result, Obasanjo and his Administration have been on the receiving end of a stream of invective from a small but vocal clique of northern politicians and Islamic clerics. Some disliked his decision; some simply dislike him and seek any opportunity to criticize. Obasanjo's firm anti-terrorism stance has had a minimal direct, measurable impact on internal security thus far (violence in Kano being the clearest exception). But simmering tensions in many parts of Nigeria do not need much more heat to boil over. The President's principled stand also highlighted the reality of the country's preexisting religious divide: The largely Christian South tends to support U.S. action while the mostly Muslim North is deeply ambivalent.

¶3. (C) Depending how our military operations unfold, the negative rhetoric of Obasanjo's militant critics could gain adherents, grow feet and take to the streets. Further demonstrations are almost certain and could turn violent, especially if civilian casualties are perceived to be increasing sharply as a result of our continuing military operations. With elections so near and party nominating conventions even closer, Obasanjo (should he run) will have to wrestle claims that he kowtowed to American pressure while ignoring the sensitivities of (the Muslim) half of Nigeria's population.

¶4. (C) Against this backdrop, President Obasanjo arrives in the U.S. to confer with President Bush about counter-terrorism. We must keep these factors in mind as we seek to forge greater cooperation between Washington and Abuja on this paramount issue.

¶5. (C) With statements condemning the attacks and supporting our military action, Nigeria has run the field on what it can do as a matter of unilateral public diplomacy. Thus, our strategy for counter-terrorism cooperation with Nigeria must rest on three columns. First, we must encourage Nigeria toward concrete unilateral actions that actualize its public statements. Second, Nigeria should play a leading role in multilateral fora, in Africa and beyond. Third, we should minimize actions that might spark internal unrest in Nigeria attributable to GON support for our efforts. It would be a blow to our objective to build an anti-terrorism front in Africa if his strong support for us weakened Obasanjo internally. It could scare other leaders and embolden our adversaries.

CONCRETE ACTION AT HOME

¶6. (C) MONEY LAUNDERING: Given Nigeria's lax regulatory scheme, the local financial system is potentially an attractive haven for terrorist funds. Nigeria must work hard to seal this sieve. Obasanjo has promised a Financial Crimes Commission (FCC) and an omnibus money-laundering law to replace the current law that only governs drug related laundering. We should accede to Obasanjo's request for

assistance in building the FCC and implementing the draft money laundering legislation (Ref C). We should also send experts to help the Central Bank of Nigeria's efforts to identify terrorist bank accounts.

17. (S/NF) INTELLIGENCE SHARING: We are already sharing more intelligence with the Nigerians than any other African service. Yet Nigeria's strong support, its importance in Africa, and the possibility that parts of Africa may be attractive alternate havens for some terrorists, make a case for us to consider a higher level of intelligence sharing. This step would require a political decision in both capitals.

18. (C) COUNTER-TERRORISM TRAINING: Nigeria police and overall security apparatus are not trained for counter-terrorism. We could help Nigeria train a small, sharply-focused inter-agency unit that could coordinate anti-terrorism efforts here. This unit could be tasked with looking for ways of improving counter-terrorism measures for oil installations. We recognize that establishing effective inter-agency groups is never easy. Each agency has its turf and established interests. However, if the number of agencies is kept to a minimum, this concept could work. Given our post-September 11 security imperatives and our long-term energy security concerns, this concept may be worth exploring.

19. (C) SOFA: A SOFA would likely cause great consternation within Nigeria, and could cost the GON political capital that could be more effectively invested elsewhere. Some alleged before 9/11 that Operation Focus Relief was really intended to establish bases from which the U.S. could strike troublesome Muslim countries. OFR is proceeding smoothly now, and we need to keep it that way. Generally, the Nigerian public mistrusts mil-to-mil relationships, and not everyone loves OFR. Seeking a SOFA risks raising many issues that are best not addressed now. We can get most of what we want/need without a formal SOFA.

110. (C) ANTI-TERRORISM CONVENTIONS AND MLAT: There is little cost for the GON to sign and ratify the anti-terrorism conventions and the MLAT. We should continue to urge these steps. On this and other points it may be useful to state that we expect Nigeria to lead Africa, and certainly West Africa.

111. (C) INVITING AMERICAN MUSLIMS: We should raise with Nigeria the idea of gathering a team of Muslim notables to visit the U.S., particularly to see WTC ground zero and talk to representatives of the Muslim community there. This might lead to a reciprocal visit. We need to change the picture many Nigerian Muslims have of the U.S. as anti-Islamic. They need to understand that the U.S. is an open, tolerant society that welcomes Muslims.

NIGERIA AKING THE LEAD IN THE REGION

112. (C) We need to press Nigeria to work within the Sub-Saharan African institutional framework to ensure that African multilateral institutions, particularly ECOWAS, support our efforts diplomatically and with practical steps. Nigeria can also play a useful role beyond Africa through its active participation in the G-77, D-8, and NAM, among other organizations.

113. (S/NF) ECOWAS SUMMIT: Nigeria should use its weight to ensure that counter-terrorism is a focal point on the agenda for the Summit tentatively set for December. We would like a strong statement from ECOWAS and would urge Nigeria to push for all member countries to sign extant terrorism conventions. ECOWAS should establish a sub-regional counter-terrorism mechanism. We should be prepared to have senior intelligence personnel to meet with ECOWAS counterparts to discuss intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism training.

114. (C) We should explore with Nigeria and Senegal ways that Wade Terrorism Initiative can be made useful. Africa (through the AU or NEPAD), and ECOWAS regionally, must align their efforts so they become complementary. Nigeria can and should be expected to lead on both levels.

115. (C) SUDAN: Nigeria participation in the Sudan Peace

Process may provide another avenue to influence Khartoum regarding its support for terrorism. Nigeria, a broker in the peace process, has decent relations with the NIF government. We should work with Nigeria to see how it can use its role in the peace process and as a leading African nation to persuade Sudan to wash its hands of supporting terrorism.

HEARTS AND MINDS

¶16. (C) Public opinion among Nigeria's Muslims is slowly turning against us. Those long opposed to us are taking ever-harder lines. We want to reverse this trend but need concrete support. We should draw a clearer evidentiary link between the September 11 attacks and Usama Bin Laden. This will go far to address the concerns of those who condemn the attacks but think we pinned them on UBL because of an anti-Muslim bias. The U.K. FCO website contains much of the material in reftel B (classified demarche cable), yet we cannot present this information to Muslim Nigeria as the USG position. Our silence is viewed in many quarters as proof of the weakness of our "case." The Department should review its restriction on dissemination of the information.

¶17. (C) Also, we may need to reshape our message regarding civilian casualties in Afghanistan. While we continue to assert that civilians are not targets, Nigerians continue to hear and see news of civilian deaths. For many Nigerian Muslims, the fact that our stand-off munitions are killing (Muslim) Afghan civilians, and we know that such unintended deaths inevitably will result, makes us "terrorists" too. While it would be easy to dismiss this logic as twisted, we must understand and respond appropriately to it if we wish to win hearts and minds. To the extent possible, we need to explain the steps taken to minimize civilian casualties. We also need to be more aggressive stating when and if the Taliban is using the civilian population as a shield. Our PD regarding USG humanitarian efforts seems to have fallen off; this needs to be re-energized.

ANDREWS